


just like my grandmother used. After four months, I was able to walk with the help of a cane. A month later, in January 2004, I was able to return to work and perform limited duties. I could teach students and grade simulator events, but it was July 2004 before a flight surgeon cleared me to resume flying duties. My command was very supportive throughout my rehabilitation, and their first priority always has been my recovery.

The good news is that I haven't required any more surgeries, and I should recover 95 percent use of my leg. As serious as my injuries were, I realize they could have been much worse. I believe that wearing the proper PPE saved my life—at least, it saved me from more serious injuries. I was wearing a full-face helmet, heavy motorcycle jacket, riding gloves, boots, and denim jeans. I especially was thankful for my helmet. It was damaged significantly on the top, sides and chin bar, and the face shield actually was torn off during the crash. Amazingly, after doing my "Flying Wallenda" impersonation over

the guardrail, I didn't even have a headache.

Were I not wearing gloves, my dislocated bones easily could have penetrated my skin. I believe my boots helped prevent any ankle injuries. Being covered head to toe prevented me from getting any abrasions or road rash. Although denim jeans aren't really adequate protective gear, they were better than nothing. Had I slid along the road, instead of being thrown over the guardrail, my jeans undoubtedly would have shredded in the first 10 feet.

What would I have done differently to prevent this accident? I would have maintained awareness of my position within the lane. Because I was riding in the right half of the lane, I already had given up a large portion of maneuvering room. Also, I failed to recognize the decreasing radius in the left turn until I was running wide to the outside of the lane. The road where I had my accident also was poorly lit, which should have been a warning for me to be extra cautious. 

Lt. Gardner flies with VAW-120

Mishap-Free Milestones

VAW-117	27 years	57,100 hours
VP-30	40 years	400,000 hours
VP-16	39 years	257,000 hours
VAQ-130	23 years	39,045 hours
VR-57	25.5 years	130,075 hours
VFA-136	11 years	47,151 hours
VFA-146	19 years	79,000 hours

VR-58	26 years	128,000 hours
VAQ-132	34 years	55,800 hours
VPU-2	22 years	56,391 hours
VQ-2	17 years	106,200 hours
VF-103	1 year	2,900 hours
VFA-131	17 years	70,000 hours
HS-10	11 years	58,000 hours
VP-45	35 years	222,000 hours
VP-26	42 years	301,000 hours
VAW-115	19 years	40,009 hours
HC-3	30 years	170,000 hours in the H-46 and 20,000 hours in the MH-60S